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Summertime

by CHARLES L. MEE

A hundred slender white birch tree trunks.

A scattering of casual, summer-house furniture all covered in white muslin.

Grass grows on a desk,
and there are stars in the sky.

A woman's white summer dress hanging from a tree branch.

Later on, there might be 300 wine glasses half-filled with rose wine.

There is not so much a set for a play, as an installation piece
in which a performance occurs.

Violin music, quietly in the distance.

Tessa wears something in the colors of Spring.
She may have a flower in her hair.
She sits at the desk.

James enters.
He, too, is wearing something the color of Easter eggs,
and he carries a bright yellow umbrella.

JAMES
Excuse me?

TESSA

Yes?

JAMES

I didn't mean to barge in...

[he closes the umbrella]

I was told I might find a translator here.

TESSA

Oh, well, I...

I do some translation sometimes.

JAMES

You are?

TESSA

Tessa.

JAMES

Tessa.

Right.

Good.

I have a few things

I need to have put into Italian.

You see,

I work for someone

a photographer

who took photographs

and then asked certain people to look at the photographs

and say things or write things

that he would then put with the photographs.

TESSA

Captions.

JAMES

Yes. Right.

Well, no, not exactly.

More like thoughts or I don't know, feelings.

That is to say, he asked Roberto Calasso to write something or, as it turned out, he thought he asked Roberto Calasso whereas in actuality he asked a journalist named Francesco Ghedini to speak to Calasso and ask Calasso to write something do you know Calasso?

TESSA

I know *of* Calasso, sure.

JAMES

Right,
and Francesco said he had spoken to Calasso
and that Calasso had written these things
the things I have here.

TESSA

I see.

JAMES

but actually Calasso never did write them
I guess Francesco made them up
or even someone else made them up and told Francesco
that they had been written by Calasso

TESSA

This is really complicated.

JAMES

What is?

TESSA

This whole story.

JAMES

Right.

Well: life itself.

TESSA

Right.

JAMES

So, when the proofs were sent to Calasso for his final approval because the book is going to press— Calasso said he had never heard of these things and if we printed them he would sue. And so we had to stop the presses and I came here to talk to Calasso.

TESSA

Calasso is here? What, for the summer?

JAMES

I guess.

TESSA

What's he doing here?

JAMES

I don't know, I guess he's on vacation.

Anyway,

when he heard what had happened with Francesco he didn't want to get Francesco into trouble

TESSA

Francesco.

JAMES

I don't know why

I suppose because he understood Francesco, you know, is just trying to make a living

and Calasso felt sympathy for Francesco, I guess, because Calasso's a nice man
and so he suggested maybe someone else could sign the words
and he suggested Benigni

TESSA

Roberto Benigni.

JAMES

Right.

Because Benigni is well known as a lover in a way
a person who loves life and women

And Calasso knows Benigni and he said he would call him—
because he's here too, vacationing...

TESSA

He is?

JAMES

Do you know Benigni?

TESSA

I know *of* Benigni.

JAMES

Right....

and the pictures are...uh...

did I say what the pictures were?

TESSA

Nudes.

JAMES

No.

Did I say that?

TESSA

I guessed.

JAMES

Well, yes.

Or, no.

Not entirely.

Some are nudes, but some are not.

I mean, many are not.

And there are men, too. And old people.

And children, I mean: as friends.

You know.

[silence]

Love.

[silence]

Sex for sure. But: also love.

TESSA

Oh, well, love.

No wonder it's so complicated.

JAMES

Right.

TESSA

These days especially.

JAMES

Right.

TESSA

With what we all know now
what we've come to know.

JAMES

Exactly.

[silence]

JAMES

Anyway the texts are in English
because we have them in type for the American edition

TESSA

and Benigni doesn't speak English

JAMES

Right. Well, not so well.

TESSA

So you need them translated back into Italian.

JAMES

Right.

[silence]

TESSA

No problem.

JAMES

What?

TESSA

No problem.

I can do that.

JAMES

Oh. Oh, great, thank you.

TESSA

Do you have them?

JAMES

Sure.

They're right here.

TESSA

So.

Why did you want Calasso to speak about love?

JAMES

Because he's, well,
he's Italian....

TESSA

Right.

JAMES

You know,
from Europe,
from an ancient civilization in a way,
the old world.

TESSA

Greece and Rome.

JAMES

Right.

And still in touch with the deeper ways of life and love
the things that are deep in human nature and eternal

TESSA

close to the dreamtime of civilization

JAMES

Right.

TESSA

The time of mythology.

JAMES

Right.

Deeper than Freud, even.

TESSA

Right.

Deeper than Freud.

[silence]

JAMES

Or, you know, I suppose we could have gotten a woman to write about it.

TESSA

Right.

Though probably that wouldn't have helped.

JAMES

No.

[silence]

Do you think I could wait here while you do it?

TESSA

This could take a while.

JAMES

Right. Of course,

and you'd rather have some privacy I guess.

I only thought,

if you had any questions.

TESSA

Sure, sure. You can stay.

You can sit there.

[silence]

JAMES

Do you mind if I just lie down?

I'm sort of jet-lagged.

TESSA

No. Fine. Please do.

JAMES

Thanks.

[he lies down;

she looks at the text for a while, quietly.]

TESSA

This line—

"deer heart"—

what is that?

JAMES [sleepily]

Um...

I don't know.

I guess it's just something that...uh...you know
someone thought of.

TESSA

Unh-hunh.

I mean, it's supposed to be an animal, a deer,

a fawn, a wild animal,

but at the same time it should suggest sweetness: d-e-a-r.

In English, you have this play on words.

JAMES

Yes. Right. I suppose you do.

That's one of the challenges of translation I guess.

TESSA

Well. Yes, it is.

[Music comes up.

Francois walks vertically down the sky,
or steps out of a wardrobe
or up out of a steamer trunk
or through the wall
or out of the trees.

He carries a rose umbrella;
and he too wears flowered or brightly colored clothes
and has a flower in his buttonhole]

FRANCOIS

Are you free for dinner?

TESSA

No.

I'm busy.

As you can see.

FRANCOIS

Everyone has to eat.

TESSA

I'm not dressed.

FRANCOIS

I have something for you.

JAMES [waking up]

Uh, excuse me.

[he hands her a crimson satin slip]

TESSA

Oh, Francois.

This is a slip.

FRANCOIS

Everyone's wearing slips these days.

TESSA
As a dress?

JAMES
Pardon me.

FRANCOIS
Yes.

TESSA
To go out?

FRANCOIS
Sure.

TESSA
Not in Martha's Vineyard, I don't think.

FRANCOIS
Of course in Martha's Vineyard.
It all started here.

TESSA
I like it.

[she steps out of her dress
and into the slip;
she wears, otherwise,
black boots, and socks that are falling down around her ankles;
or else, she takes off the dress and doesn't put the slip on,
wearing nothing else but stockings and red high heels]

JAMES
What is this?
I beg your pardon,
but you seem to have interrupted something here.

FRANCOIS
Do you believe in love at first sight?

TESSA

No.

JAMES

What's going on?

FRANCOIS

It's the truth.

TESSA

So?

FRANCOIS

So what?

TESSA

So why do you tell me this?

FRANCOIS

Because perhaps this is how it is for us.

TESSA

How can this be after all these years we've known one another?

FRANCOIS

Because sometimes you don't see the other person at first.

And then suddenly you do.

You sense something in one another.

You might not even know what it is.

In fact, probably you never know,

the connection is so deep,

beneath the place where language even starts.

And then, if you let the moment pass, it is past forever.

And what you never know is:

was this a great love or not?

Was this your one great love

that you've just missed.

Because each of us is given only one great love in life.

That's what all the poets have known.

We've forgotten it in our times.
I think we get too caught up in our daily lives.
But people used to know:
you are born,
you have one great love,
you die.
There's nothing else to life.
That's why, in Romeo and Juliet,
after they find their love,
they die.
Because that's the truth of it:
birth, love, and death,
that's all there is.
Your great love may come at the beginning of your life,
or in the middle,
or near the end.
Or not at all.
But there is only one
and if you miss it,
you've missed it forever.

JAMES

This is exactly what I meant to say to you.
This is what I myself was thinking when I first met you.

TESSA

Is this what you always say to women?

FRANCOIS

No.

JAMES

I was going to say the very same thing to you
but I was afraid you would think I was too forward.

FRANCOIS

Do you dance?

TESSA

Of course I dance.

JAMES

Excuse me.

Wait a moment.

Uh...I beg your pardon.

Goddammit.

[Music comes up.

They dance—

not just for a moment

but this dance is a long performance event of its own.

James paces back and forth,
wanting to interrupt, feeling too uncertain and shy,
until finally he does.]

JAMES

Well, look, finally,

I don't mean to interrupt, but...

TESSA

I'm sorry.

James, this is my friend Francois.

JAMES

Yes, so I gather.

It seems that I happen to doze off for a minute
and now you're dancing with someone else.

TESSA

What?

JAMES

You're dancing with someone else.

[she hurriedly puts on the slip—if she didn't have it on]

TESSA

Someone else?

[the following is all on top of one another]

JAMES

Well, yes.

Excuse me,

Tessa and I...

I thought we...

well, I might have been mistaken,

but I thought we were...

taken up with one another.

FRANCOIS [withdrawing]

Oh, I beg your pardon.

I didn't realize.

TESSA

What?

Taken up with one another.

What he means is...

FRANCOIS

I didn't realize....

I didn't mean to intrude.

TESSA

You're not intruding.

This is a...

we have a business relationship.

I mean we are...

I am working for him

in the sense that...uh....

FRANCOIS

That's quite all right. I'll just be....

JAMES

Business relationship, yes.

I suppose so, but I thought there was something more than that.

I thought...

FRANCOIS

Possibly we'll have the pleasure again....

[he exits;

at the same moment, Mimi enters,
coming out of the woodwork or the woods
also with a brightly colored umbrella
and brightly colored clothes.

She doesn't speak for a while;
she just stands there, drinking an iced tea, and watching.]

TESSA

What have you done?

JAMES

Done?

I hope I haven't done anything.

I certainly didn't mean....

TESSA

This was my friend!

I was dancing!

JAMES

Yes, I see.

And I didn't mean to....

TESSA

What are you,
some kind of stalker?

JAMES

No. No.

All this happened totally by chance

by pure chance.

Stalker!

TESSA

We might have been....

I mean, you can't tell what you might have interrupted....

JAMES

I know.

I'm sorry.

Well, in fact, of course,

I don't mean to presume,

but I also thought that perhaps you felt....

that is to say,

we met,

and frankly I felt something right away,

and I even thought perhaps you might have felt something, too.

TESSA

Felt something?

For you?

JAMES

Yes, for me.

I thought I sensed something special possibly.

Are you telling me you didn't feel some connection?

TESSA

No. No, I didn't.

JAMES

I was just a stranger with whom you were doing business

and, knowing nothing about me, you let me sleep here with you

and you felt no connection?

TESSA

Sleep with me?

JAMES

From the first moment I saw you
I thought
here is a wonderful person
and I thought you felt something of the same
but now you seem, well,
as though you might be denying your impulse.

TESSA

Impulse? I don't have an impulse!

JAMES

What do you call it?

TESSA

I call it nothing.
Are you crazy?
You thought
we were in love?

JAMES

Not that I thought we were in love,
but that perhaps there was some feeling of a connection.
You have such beautiful eyes.

TESSA

Eyes? Eyes?
I have nothing to do with my eyes.
They have nothing to do with me.
Get out! Get out! Just get out!

JAMES

I'm sorry. I apologize.
I'm leaving.
I wouldn't think of staying another minute.

TESSA
Then go!

MIMI
Excuse me.

[Tessa wheels around to see Mimi]

TESSA
God, Mimi, am I glad to see another woman.
I am so sick of men
and all their talk of love and sex

JAMES
I don't think I mentioned sex.

MIMI
Love, I hate love

TESSA
do you know has it ever been anything but a cover
for some kind of manipulative bullshit
some kind of exploitation

JAMES
I don't think I was trying to....

TESSA
has anything ever done more damage to me than love?

MIMI
These men what is sex to them
but some way to avoid any sort of reality altogether

TESSA
call it love
and it's nothing but a hideout.

MIMI

I know just how you feel.
I feel the same way exactly.

TESSA

A woman wants another person with whom she can relate

JAMES

And so does a man.

TESSA

one who sympathizes

MIMI

who can know how she feels

JAMES

Just like a man.

TESSA

and know who she is in some deep sense

MIMI

accept her for exactly who she is

JAMES

As a man hopes as well.

TESSA

not try to keep just to the surface of things

MIMI

avoid the real involvement with the deeper things
that are inevitably more complex

TESSA

and sometimes not entirely easy to deal with

MIMI

but this is the real human exchange
the exchange with the inner being
that feels really good and consoling

TESSA

and, as far as that goes, really hot

MIMI

and sexy

TESSA

Exactly.

JAMES

Excuse me, but is there maybe something
are you two having some sort of....?

TESSA

Certainly not.

JAMES

Because I thought I sensed...

TESSA

You sensed something again?

JAMES

If not on your part for her
then possibly on her part for you.

MIMI

Certainly not.

JAMES

I think so.

MIMI

Absolutely not.

TESSA

I am a person without any involvements whatsoever!
And that is exactly how I intend to keep it!

JAMES

And all the while
doesn't it mean anything to you
that I think I love you?

TESSA

Love me?

MIMI

You think you love her?

JAMES

It happened so suddenly—
who's to know?
it was all the most fortuitous event
but, in fact, this could be our real chance in life, Tessa.

TESSA

I hope not.
[to Mimi]
He could be some kind of narcoleptic.

JAMES

You don't know anything about me.
We've only just met.
Maybe I seem like a jerk to you

TESSA

Well....

JAMES

but that could be just because it's an awkward time
I'm not at my best
something like that
I mean everybody has these potentials within them

to look like a jerk
or even to be a jerk
but they might be more
like 90% of the time or even 98% of the time
really fine people
or good people
or funny
or even,
you know,
hot.
I might be like that
and then that would be good for us
because I tell you
I'm crazy about you.

TESSA

You walk in on me with some random project.
You don't even know me.

JAMES

You don't think I do?
People are smarter than we think.
We think
it takes a long time to get to know someone
and in a way it does
but we know so much from the first second
it's not just the words another person speaks
we right away take in
their, you know, body language
the way they hold themselves
cock their heads
how their hair falls and how they push it away from their eyes
whether impatiently or gently
whether they are irritable or thoughtful people
gentle or violent
caressing or insensitive
how they smell
whether they look directly in your eyes
or they can't look up from the ground

or meet your gaze directly
or their eyes dart from side to side
because they are anxious in a way
they will never change
I saw you
and I knew:
I've looked for you all my life.
I love you.

[Francois enters,
sees Mimi, starts to sneak back out.]

MIMI
Francois!

FRANCOIS
Oh,
Mimi.
Imagine that. It's been...

MIMI
A long time.

FRANCOIS
Yes. Precisely.
How extraordinary.

TESSA
You know each other?

MIMI FRANCOIS
We were... We had a...

FRANCOIS
We lived together...

MIMI
Briefly.

We spent the weekend together in San Remy.

FRANCOIS

A wonderful time...

JAMES

Excuse me, but we were having a conversation here.

MIMI

Until what?

You walked out the door...

FRANCOIS

We were outdoors at the time.

MIMI

Right. In a little outdoor cafe.

TESSA [to Mimi]

You never told me this?

FRANCOIS

So, technically speaking...

JAMES

Perhaps you would excuse us....

FRANCOIS [to James]

I'm sorry....

MIMI

You walked out of the cafe
and got into some woman's car.

FRANCOIS

Not some woman.

That woman was a friend.

I mean,

I had known her....

which is to say
I had been friends with her at one time
and then there she was in San Remy
she asked for my help.

MIMI
Your help?

TESSA
Who was this?

JAMES
Do we care about your love affairs?

FRANCOIS [to James]
I beg your pardon.

[to Mimi]

It seems she was there with a fellow
who wouldn't let her out of his sight
and she needed to phone her husband
so I said I would drive her to a telephone I knew
by the side of the road
where she could make a call
with the motor running as it were
and I could bring her back.

MIMI
But?

FRANCOIS
Well, but it turned out, of course,
the phone was out of order
and then she was frightened to return
so she convinced me to drive her to another town
down towards Les Baux
and

[shrugs]

by that time it had become so late
and I thought you would have been angry
so that, for me to return....

MIMI

So instead you disappeared.

[He shrugs.]

Men! Men!

You appear and then you disappear!

[She turns away from him,
not knowing which way to go.

Four people come out of nowhere
simultaneously,
in mid-sentence:

Natalie,
Maria,
Frank,
and Edmund.

They are all dressed in summer clothes,
beachwear perhaps,
or linen things in greens and whites.
They all wear sunglasses.

This is a multiracial and differently abled cast.]

MARIA

...which is not what I meant to do at all.

FRANK

So you say

so you always say when you do these things

EDMUND

That happens to me all the time
finding I've done something I never meant to do

FRANK

and yet how could you not mean it
when it happens over and over again

NATALIE

Me.

I do what I mean to do
and when it's done
I've done it.
What do I care?

MARIA

Francois!

NATALIE

Mimi!

[Francois spins around one way,
Mimi spins around the other.]

FRANCOIS

Maria!

MIMI

Natalie!

NATALIE

What are you doing here?

MIMI

Yes, well...

I might ask the same of you.

And yet, how wonderful to see you.

[to Tessa]

This is my friend Natalie.
This is Tessa.

MARIA
Ah, Tessa!

TESSA
Mother!

MARIA
I didn't realize you knew Francois!

TESSA
Well, *know* him.
I don't know that I *know* him.

FRANK
It would seem that's just as well.
And yet,
we step out of the house for what seems a few minutes
and already you're having a house party.

MARIA
It's alright, Frank,
she's a grown woman,
this is her home, too,
she should do as she likes.

FRANK
And yet, entertaining men.

NATALIE
Can you just say
how wonderful to see you
and that's that?

MIMI

What's what?

NATALIE

I thought,

well,

I thought

getting to know you

you changed my life.

Really.

Everything I thought.

Who I was.

Who I thought I was.

What I meant to do with my life.

How I meant to live.

How it was to see the world with new eyes

and feel all my feelings completely transformed.

And yet it seems

I meant nothing to you!

Nothing!

I thought you would be my whole life!

[She bursts into tears,

turns around

and disappears.]

MIMI

Natalie!

Natalie!

[Everyone is looking quizzically at Mimi.]

It was just a casual thing, you know.

Not that I'm not really fond of her.

Women,

sometimes they like a dalliance with another woman

or the warmth of friendship

whatever

but I am definitely heterosexual.

I just happen to be someone who likes men.
I like men!
That's just who I am.
Of course maybe I've had some relationships with women

JAMES
Exactly what I thought.

MIMI
But I've had a lot of relationships with men,
I shouldn't say a lot
but, on balance....

JAMES
Who are these people?

[Note: Throughout the piece, all the characters are meant to inhabit the setting
with a physical life independent of the dialogue and actions

—

that is, they are meant to lounge and do their nails and write books
and despair and try on various outfits and practice solo dances
and perform tai chi and carry on lives as others occupy center stage.]

TESSA
This is my family.

MIMI
And friends.

TESSA
And friends.

JAMES
I thought we were going to be alone.

TESSA
Where did you get that idea?

EDMUND

No one is alone.

We all come into the world with a family.

We all have a past.

MARIA

And a present, too, it would seem!

FRANCOIS

None of us starts a new day carte blanche, do you think?

JAMES

Yes. Yes, I do.

Why does a bride wear a white wedding dress?

Because she starts anew.

But what chance is there for us?

TESSA

What chance was there ever?

JAMES

This is a minefield!

FRANCOIS

A battlefield.

MIMI

A rubblefield.

JAMES

How is anyone supposed to know where to put a foot?

FRANK

You're a friend of my daughter?

JAMES

Your daughter?

FRANK

Yes, Tessa is my daughter.

JAMES

Well, friend I don't know.

I'd certainly like to be.

FRANK

Indeed.

MARIA

And, in fact, Francois,
what exactly are you doing here?

FRANCOIS

It's not entirely clear to me

what I'm doing here.

As it started out

what I thought was

it was a perfectly straightforward life plan

as clear as the plot of a novel

I was setting out in life

to find a woman I could love

and who loved me

and then one thing led to another

I found myself with a friend

the next thing I knew I was at a chateau in the country

where there were many people

there was a party

I couldn't find the woman I had come with

you know

[he shrugs]

I became disoriented.

But as I think about it

I think

is this not how life is?

You think you are doing one thing

it turns out you have been doing something else entirely
life has no plot
you only think it does
while all the time something without a plot is happening to you
over and over until you reach the end of your life
and you think you've had a beginning and a middle and an end
but all you've had is a start and a stop
and a lot of disorientation in between
trying to get a grip
hoping for true love
maybe you have a chance and you lose it
you don't know where it went
you're not sure if you had it
or who it was with
maybe the time you least thought it was meaningful at all
that was your one chance
you walked right past it
while you were pursuing another woman
and then you kick the bucket....

[Maria slaps Francois.]

FRANCOIS

What?

MARIA

How can you flirt with her like this?

FRANCOIS

Flirt with her?

Flirt with whom?

MARIA

I was always the one who loved you.

FRANK

Excuse me.

I'm feeling a little....

MARIA

I called you all the time.

You never called.

FRANK

I don't think this is meant for me....

FRANCOIS

Maria, please,

this is hardly the right occasion....

MARIA

What?

You can't bear to hear the truth?

EDMUND [kindly]

Frank,

would you do me a favor?

Would you get me a little milk for my tea?

FRANK [disoriented]

Milk. Yes. Of course.

[he leaves]

JAMES [stupefied, looking at Maria]

So, this is your mother?

TESSA

Yes! Yes! So you see!

This is what I grew up with!

What chance did I have with a family like this?

And you want to fall in love with me?

How can anyone expect me to form any kind of relationship
with another human being?

[Tessa goes to the couch
where she lies down,
face buried in a pillow,
like a Balthus girl,
disconsolate.

James follows her to the couch, uncertain what to do to help.
During the following conversation,
James moves toward her, then away,
toward her again, then away.

Finally, James finds a blanket
and gently puts it over Tessa;
she accepts the blanket without acknowledging him.]

MARIA

So
you ignore me,
you neglect me,
you're always running around with these sluts

MIMI

I beg your pardon?

MARIA

Actresses, then, actresses!

MIMI

Sculptors!

MARIA

Artists. Whatever.
I love you, Francois,
I was always the only one who ever loved you.
You will end up alone and lonely
because you can't know what it is to be loved.
You think I am clinging and demanding

FRANCOIS

And neurotic, frankly.

Let's be honest.

MARIA [to Francois]

You think you'd like to get rid of me
but I could take care of you forever, Francois!
Sometimes, Francois, I think you are a good person
if only sometimes you wouldn't try so hard
if you would just relax
let life come to you
take it as it is
don't always be on the prowl
because, in the end,
all we have is one another
you're not a boy any longer
you won't live forever
and what you will have had will be your friends
these days like today
where nothing special happens to you
but you have been with me

[she is weeping now]

I don't want to go through life
always bickering, always unhappy
feeling cheated
I could be content just to have a glass of wine
to dance
to hear you sing
I don't care what kind of voice you have
I love you
I can be with you as long as we have on earth
it's not so bad
just to love and be loved

FRANCOIS

On again off again!

On again off again!

You are a lunatic!

MARIA

I'm a person who says what I feel
when I feel it.

With me you always know where you stand.

You can count on it.

That is a kind of certainty and security
that is almost impossible to come by in this world.

We could have another chance, Francois!

FRANCOIS

Would you stop this holding on to me?

Can't I take a breath?

Can't I go out to dinner?

You are a married woman!

This is disgraceful!

Can't I do my job without you calling
tracking me down,

you'd think you were my wife

asking me, can you see me now,

can I come with you,

where are you now?

Who are you with?

Are you having an affair?

You're more than neurotic

[Barbara, the cook,
enters wiping her hands on a dish towel,
stands there listening to Francois.]

you're psychotic
with your crying and your pleading
and what else
your taking pills to go to sleep
pills to wake up.

I have to live my life,
you would suffocate me,
you would pull me down and bury me alive!
I wish you were dead!
Dead!

[silence;

all this time,
James is getting a cup of tea for Tessa, which,
again,
she accepts from him
but without acknowledging him]

BARBARA

So this is how people speak to one another these days?
Men.
Who wants you?
With a man, every act of love is an act of rape.

A man will swim through a river of snot,
wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit,
if he thinks there'll be a friendly pussy waiting for him on the other side.
He'll screw a woman he despises,
any snaggle-toothed hag,
and furthermore, pay for the opportunity.
A man will fuck mud if he has to.
And why is that?
Because every man, deep down,
knows he is a worthless piece of shit
hoping some woman will make him feel good about himself.

Eaten up with guilt, shame, fears and insecurities
obsessed with screwing,
to call a man an animal is to flatter him;
a man is a walking dildo,

a completely isolated unit,
trapped inside himself,
incapable of love, friendship, affection or tenderness
his responses entirely visceral, never cerebral
his intelligence a mere tool of his drives and needs;
a half-dead, unresponsive lump of flesh,
trapped in a twilight zone halfway between humans and apes.

Why did god create man?
Because a vibrator can't mow the lawn.

I went to the County Fair.
They had one of those "Believe it or not?" Shows.
They had a man born with a penis *and* a brain.

Why were men given brains larger than dogs?
So they wouldn't hump women's legs at cocktail parties.

My feelings about men
are like a Jew just released from Dachau.
I watch the handsome young Nazi soldier
fall writhing to the ground with a bullet in his stomach
and I look briefly and walk on.
I don't even need to shrug.

Men pretend to be normal
but what they're doing sitting there
with benign smiles on their faces
is they're manufacturing sperm.
They do it all the time.
They never stop.
They are suffering from testosterone poisoning.

You know what they say:
What do you call a man with half a brain?
Gifted.

Why do men name their penises?
Because they want to be on a first-name basis
with the person who makes all their decisions.

What do you call the useless bit of fatty tissue
at the end of a penis?
A man.

Will all these people be staying to lunch?

FRANCOIS

I wouldn't eat a lunch you made if it were the last piece of uncooked shit on the
planet.

What is it with you women
you think men can't live without you.

Have you noticed
how uncomfortable it is for most women
to put their elbows on the table while they eat?
Because the table is too high for them.
But for most men,
it is uncomfortable not to put their elbows on the table
because they are taller.
But it's not proper to put one's elbows on the table.

And why is that?
Because etiquette is a system that defines as appropriate
what is natural for a woman,
and defines as inappropriate what is natural for a man.

[In the middle of this,
a slimy young Italian guy enters
to deliver a pizza.
He stands there holding the pizza box.]

So, of course,
similarly,
perhaps one should not be so surprised that pornography,
which appeals to men

is condemned,
while soap operas and romance novels,
the female equivalent of pornography
is acceptable.
And so, of course, men have become ashamed that they are men.
And so women control men as they wish, at their whim,
they get men to do whatever women want them to do.
The women get the men to do the dirty work, the violence,
the bad stuff
whatever women want but don't want to do with their own hands
so they can have whatever they like
and blame the men for it.

BOB [holding the pizza box as he speaks]
And yet, I think, nonetheless,
forgiveness is possible.

FRANCOIS
You do.

BOB
Well, sure.
Really under any circumstances.

Uh, primarily, uh, uh, the, uh, the...
primarily the question is
does man have the power to forgive himself.
And he does.
That's essentially it.
I mean if you forgive yourself,
and you absolve yourself of all, uh,
of all wrongdoing in an incident,
then you're forgiven.
Who cares what other people think, because uh...

EDMUND
Was this a process you had to go through over a period of time?
Did you have to think about it?

BOB

Well, no.

Not until I was reading the Aquarian gospel did I,
did I strike upon,
you know I had almost had ends meet because I had certain
uh you know
to-be-or-not-to-be reflections about of course what I did.
And uh,

EDMUND

I'm sorry, what was that?

BOB

Triple murder.

Sister, husband. Sister, husband,
and a nephew, my nephew.
And uh, you know, uh, manic depressive.

EDMUND

Do you mind my asking what instruments did you use?
What were the instruments?

BOB

It was a knife.
It was a knife.

EDMUND

A knife?

BOB

Yes.

EDMUND

So then, the three of them were all...

BOB

Ssssss...

(points to slitting his throat)

like that.

EDMUND

So, uh,
do you think that as time goes by,
this episode will just become part of your past,
or has it already...

BOB

It has already become part of my past.

EDMUND

Has already become part of your past.
No sleepless nights? No...

BOB

Aw, no. In the first three or four years there was a couple of nights where I would stay up thinking about how I did it, you know. And what they said...they told me later there were so many stab wounds in my sister and I said no, that's not true at all, you know. So I think I had a little blackout during the murders, but uh...

[he sits,
making himself at home]

Well, uh, they said there was something like thirty stab wounds in my sister, and I remember distinctly I just cut her throat once. That was all, you know, and I don't know where the thirty stab wounds came from. So that might have been some kind of blackout thing. You know, I was trying to re- re- re- uh, re- uh, uh, resurrect the uh, the crime—my initial steps, etc. You know, and uh, and uh, I took, as a matter of fact, it came right out of the, I was starting the New Testament at the time, matter of fact I'm about the only person you'll ever meet that went to, to do a triple murder with a Bible in his, in his pocket, and, and, listening to a radio. I had delusions of grandeur with the radio. Uh, I had a red shirt on that was symbolic of, of some lines in Revelation, in the, in the New Testament. Uh I had a red motor...as a matter of fact, I think it was chapter 6 something, verses 3, 4, or 5, or something where uh it was a man, it was a man. On a red horse. And, and, a man on a red horse came out, and uh, and uh uh, and he was given a knife, and unto him was given the

power to kill and destroy. And I actually thought I was this person. And I thought that my red horse was this red Harley Davidson I had. And I wore...it was just, you know, it was kind of a symbolic type of thing. And and and uh, you know, uh after the murders I thought the nephew was, was the, was a new devil or something, you know. This, this is pretty bizarre now that I think back on it. I thought he was a new devil and uh, uh. I mean basically I love my sister, there's no question about that. But at times my sister hadn't come through uh for me. You know and I was in another, one of these manic attacks. And uh, and uh, uh, uh, you know, uh, I was just uh, I was just you know, I mean I was fed up with all this you know one day they treat me good and then they tell all these other people that I was a maniac and watch out for me and etc. and like that. And uh, uh, so I went to them that night to tell them I was all in trouble again, you know, and could they put me up for the night, you know, and they told me to take a hike and uh so uh, believing that I had the power to kill, uh you know, that was that for them. You know. I mean when family turns you out, that's a real blow. You know. But uh, back to the original subject of forgiveness. If I forgive myself I'm forgiven. You know that's essentially the answer. I'm the captain of my own ship. I run my own ship. Nobody can crawl in my ship unless they get permission. I just (he nods) "over there." You know. "I'm forgiven." You know. Ha-ha. You know. (Laughs.) It's as simple as that. You know. You're your own priest, you're your own leader, you're your own captain. You know. You run your own show, a lot of people know that.

Who ordered a pizza?

TESSA

I did, but that was hours ago.

BOB

Well, here it is.

TESSA

I'm sorry, it's too late.

[Frank returns, holding a glass of water.]

BOB

Too late?

I don't think so.

Who's going to pay for the pizza?

FRANK

Here you are Edmund.

EDMUND

What is this?

FRANK

You asked for a glass of water.

EDMUND

No, Frank.

[he laughs]

Not a glass of water.

A little milk for my tea.

FRANK [confused]

I'm sorry.

I don't know what I was thinking.

EDMUND

Never mind.

FRANK

No, no,

I'll be right back.

[Frank leaves.]

BOB

Who's going to pay for the fucking pizza?

EDMUND

I'll pay for it.

Give it to me.

BOB

Plain cheese.

EDMUND

Right.

Here.

Keep the change.

BOB

Thanks. I appreciate it.

Which way did I come in?

EDMUND

That way.

BOB

Are you sure?

EDMUND

I'm sure.

BOB

Don't fuck with me.

EDMUND

I would never fuck with you.

BOB

Right.

Thanks again.

[Bob leaves.]

BARBARA

I'll take the pizza.

[Barbara exits with the pizza.]

MIMI [to Francois]

You know,

I myself knew a woman,

I won't say who,
who was in love with a man who was married,
and this married man went away on vacation with his wife.

FRANCOIS

Mimi, this is
this is probably not a perfect moment.

MIMI

And the woman I knew, who was left at home,
spent every day thinking
not just what *she* was doing at every moment
but what this *man* was doing at every moment, too,

MARIA

Who was this?

[Francois paces back and forth, moping his brow
as Mimi assaults him with this story of their past]

MIMI

knowing, as she got up in the morning
that her lover was waking up with his wife

MARIA

Who was this, Francois?

FRANCOIS

I wouldn't know.
This is some sort of I don't know what.

MIMI

and behaving as he always did in the morning
lying in bed,
turning over to embrace his wife
perhaps making love

MARIA

Are you saying that you were married?
That you have a wife?

FRANCOIS [to the others]

There's not a shred of truth to this.
Essentially.

MIMI

and lying there under the covers afterwards
as his wife went to make a cup of tea for him
bringing it back to bed

MARIA

All this time you've been married
and I never knew?

FRANCOIS

No, not married.
Of course, in the past....
in a different time,
at another time,
as you yourself are married at the present time.

MIMI

the conversation then, the planning for the day,
the breakfast in the cafe

MARIA [totally thrown, sinking to the ground, talking to herself]

How could this be
and I didn't know?

EDMUND

There's only so much pain a human being can endure
before they cave right in.

MIMI

his reading things out loud from the newspaper
every moment, for two weeks,

FRANCOIS

How can you say this?

MIMI

this woman thought all the time, every moment, of what her lover was doing
waiting for the moment that he would return
and call her

FRANCOIS

What could I have done?
Given the circumstances!

MARIA

I can't believe I never knew this!

MIMI

and come by and take her out to dinner
and spend the night with her

MARIA

How do human beings keep themselves from knowing things all the time?

MIMI

she knew the hour and the minute that he would return

MARIA

This is inconceivable.

MIMI

and when at last he did return
and the woman waited by the phone for him to call
he did not call that evening

MARIA

We do this with everything.

MIMI

he might have been delayed by the weekend traffic
and he did not call late that night
or early in the morning

FRANCOIS

Well, I couldn't call.

MARIA

We make ourselves unconscious
and then we wonder why we are so tormented.

MIMI

not from home or from the road saying he had been delayed
he did not call all that next day or night
he did not call until the following day
in the afternoon

FRANCOIS

I couldn't very well get to a phone.

MARIA

Couldn't get to a phone?

MIMI

from his office

FRANCOIS

Mimi....

MIMI

to suggest dinner the following week.
So what did this woman do?

FRANCOIS

What?

MIMI

She waited for her lover.

She waited until the time he said for dinner.
She waited for him,
and she is still waiting.

[She sinks to the ground
next to Tessa
so that now, Tessa, Maria, and Mimi are all on the ground.]

EDMUND

Human beings are as tough as cockroaches, really.
They can take so much more than they can imagine.
But, at a point, you can crush them.

JAMES

You know,
I can understand how perhaps he couldn't call.
I mean, I myself have been in a similar situation.
Sometimes it's not easy to call.

[silence]

TESSA [speaking quietly, sadly to James]

So
it turns out
you mean you meant nothing of what you said to me.

JAMES

What?

TESSA

You lied to me.

JAMES

I never lied to you.
What are you saying?

TESSA [still quietly]

I think you did.
You came to me with someone else still in your heart.

You said you loved me.

But, in fact, you weren't free to say such a thing at all.

Part of you still belonged to someone else.

Part of you was stuck to someone else.

JAMES

What who are you talking about?

TESSA

This other woman you didn't call.

JAMES

It was not.

I was just saying—this was long ago.

I was not stuck to someone.

I mean,

of course, as you say yourself, we never shed our pasts entirely.

But I wasn't *stuck* to anyone.

TESSA [close to tears]

I'd like to be able to trust someone, you know.

You see the sort of life I've had

I could turn out to be a totally fucked up person myself

[now she is crying]

and what I need more than anything is someone I could trust

and I thought

even though you were a jerk

I could trust you.

JAMES

I'm a jerk?

TESSA

I mean, I'm sorry,

I mean even though you came on to me,

well, face it, James,

the way you came on to me

it wasn't exactly so suave
but I thought you were sincere
and honest
and innocent

[she is sobbing]

and for a moment I thought:
oh, I could trust you
I could trust you
and now it turns out
you're just like every other man!

[she curls up in a fetal position
underneath the desk]

JAMES

I'm not!

I'm not!

I'm not like a man at all!

[He throws himself to the ground in a heap,
bouncing and rolling several times
before he settles down in a funk.]

FRANCOIS [trying to whisper, or speak privately]

Maria, I think, perhaps, frankly,
we just need to make love
it's been so long
we need to be close to one another again to have some hope.

MARIA

Are you serious?

This is disgusting.

I wouldn't touch you.

I wouldn't touch you.

Not now.

I could vomit.

FRANCOIS [still trying to keep this conversation from the others]

We've just gotten off track.

If you come to bed with me it'll go away.

It always does.

MARIA

You're pathetic.

You've never really made love to me.

To *me*.

You don't even know who I am.

You don't even notice.

FRANCOIS

You're really crazy if that's what you think.

MARIA

Oh, I'm crazy?

You think you're in love with someone
who is repulsed by the very smell of you
and I'm the one who's crazy?

Everyone kept telling me what a great guy you were.

So I looked past the fact that you bored me to tears.

I suffered through your endless inane monologues about rocks.

I tried to see you for what you think you are,
strutting around the house as if you were a man:
you're a fucking dwarf!

I could kick you across the room.

MIMI

What a beast.

FRANCOIS

What do you mean, I'm a beast?

MIMI

Yes!

TESSA

Would you people get out?

Would you just get out?

Don't you know some people are trying to lead their lives
trying to lead lives that are not all FUCKED UP?

Don't you people know

how you treat people

this is who you are!

A person is not what job he does

or how the neurons work inside his skull

or how he looks in the suit he wears

but how he is with other people

and this then is the world he makes

for others to live in

whether this world is happy or savage!

[silence]

FRANCOIS

It's true. It's true.

I am a beast.

Oh, god.

I'm sorry.

What can I do?

I can't say that I can't do anything about it

because I have to try

that's my responsibility

but I can't seem to do anything about it.

God, what a loathsome person I've become.

MARIA

Francois I never want to see you again.

FRANCOIS

What's wrong with me?

What do you mean?

MARIA

Just what I say.

FRANCOIS

Never?

You never want to see me again?

[to James]

You know when people say never,
I never believe they really mean it.

MARIA

Okay, then, okay:

For five years!

I don't want to see you for exactly *five* years,
not a moment before!

[she vanishes]

FRANCOIS

Oh right! Great!

You never know where you stand with women, do you?

Whatever you do is wrong.

One day they call you a satyr,
the next day an impotent idiot.

You can never tell what they want.

In a word, then, the poisoning has begun.

The man has been used, that's all.

One of a number of equally acceptable items
taken down from the shelf, used, put back,
never valued for himself, no,
but only for what can be gotten out of him.

And then women will complain about physical satisfaction!

Or gossip to her friends about her lover.

A man, on the other hand, would consider it a betrayal of her trust,
her privacy.

It never occurs to a woman to think he

might have miscalculated about her
Might have second thoughts about *her*—
in giving her what she needs to feel secure,
having given away himself
so that he no longer *possesses* himself
so that he no longer knows who he is
or if he even exists any longer!

[he turns on the radio at full, hostile volume,
rips off his shirt in a rage and throws it across the stage
and does a quick, hostile, sexually suggestive dance step
and then he takes off his belt and hurls it across the stage
and does another hostile dance step;

this is strip music he is working to
and soon he is taking off his shoes and hurling them across the stage
then unzipping his trousers
and he is totally into a striptease—still with anger and defiant sexuality—
and he does the full Dionysian thing,
completely into it and wild.
This goes on for a long time—a full performance.

Eventually the music stops,
and he is left alone there,
suddenly embarrassed.
He stops, looks around;
everyone is just looking at him,
and he is humiliated.
Sheepishly, he starts to gather up his clothes and awkwardly put them on.]

FRANK
Here you are, Edmund.

EDMUND
What is this?

FRANK
Your tea.

EDMUND

My tea?

Frank, do you never listen to me?

FRANK

What?

EDMUND

I asked you for milk for my tea.

FRANK

Milk?

EDMUND

Do you never pay attention to me?

FRANK

I'm sorry.

I'll get it for you right away.

EDMUND

Never mind.

FRANK

No, no, I'll be right back.

EDMUND

Never mind, Frank, it doesn't matter any more.

FRANK

I said I'll get it!

EDMUND

Fuck it!

I don't want it!

FRANK

I said I'd get it goddammit!
And I will goddam get it!
Am I not always getting things for you?
Get this, get that,
you stand here like the Prince of Wales
while I fetch things for you night and day
and one time I happen to get the wrong thing
and you say I never listen to you?

EDMUND

Because in fact you don't!
I think I have no respect for you
or common courtesy
certainly no real sympathy
or empathy
or love as one might expect
even from simply another human being passing in the night.
Think how it is:
you are sleeping with another person.

FRANK

That's not true.

EDMUND

You are sleeping with Maria.

FRANK

Oh, Maria. Well....

EDMUND

Well, what?

FRANK

Well, she's my wife.

EDMUND

You mean, yes, you are sleeping with Maria.

FRANK

Sleeping with her yes.

But she's my wife, my wife.

EDMUND

So?

FRANK

It's not as though we were lovers.

EDMUND

You say you're not.

But you sleep with her.

You love her.

You love to be with her.

She makes you laugh.

She thrills you.

FRANK

Yes, yes, yes.

So?

EDMUND

Well, there are many kinds of lovers in the world,
many kinds of relationships,
marriages even, you might say.

You are married to her.

FRANK

Only in the sense of being married
not in the sense of being married as you use the term.

EDMUND

You sleep in the same bed.

FRANK

So what?

You can sleep with us, too, if you like.

EDMUND

I beg your pardon?

FRANK

Well, we *are* friends.

EDMUND

Who?

You and I?

FRANK

Well, yes,

also you and I.

I mean you and I *are* friends, aren't we?

I hope.

EDMUND

You hope?

You hope?

What do you mean you hope?

FRANK

Forget it! Just forget it!

I'll be right back, goddammit!

[Frank leaves.]

EDMUND

Forget it!

And what do you suppose happened when I went over for dinner the other night?

I arrive, and he says, what is it you're doing here?

I've come to dinner, I say.

Did I invite you to dinner, he says. No I don't think so.

Why don't you have dinner with me, I say.

I can't. You know, he says, this is too much. I can't....

Just dinner, I say. Nothing more.

You say so, he says, and then you just want to stay on after dinner....

When you talk this way, I say to him, I begin to feel like I'm expecting a death sentence.

Then we argue, he says, you cajole me, you don't leave and you don't leave, I begin to feel cornered.

I shout at him: I'm just talking about dinner!

Next thing you know, he says, you think there's no reason you shouldn't spend the night....

If we just sleep together, I say to him, just sleep in the same bed, nothing more

And then, he yells at me for no reason at all, when you fall asleep I look at you and I see how ugly you are when you're relaxed.

What, I say, what?

That's when you're at your ugliest, he says, when you're asleep so that I can't stand it.

When I'm asleep I'm ugly, I say, that's what you're saying?

Or really anytime after twelve o' clock, he says: old and ugly

Every night?, I say. Are you saying every night?

Yes, he says, yes. Almost every night. Ugly and repulsive. Like another person altogether. So that I hardly recognize you except I say to myself: right, yes, there you are again the way you really are. Last night I woke up with palpitations and a pain in my head and I thought: right, there you are again, attacking me in the middle of the night when I'm defenceless.

I'm attacking you?, I say!

Like the time you tried to hyptonize me while I was asleep, he says, setting my nerves on edge so I had to hit you in the face that time to get you to stop, you remember that and you said you were being eaten alive by worms.

I did not. You didn't hear a word I said.

EDMUND AND MIMI TOGETHER

I hang on every fucking stupid word you ever say!

EDMUND

Every stupid word I say!

You are stupid.

Stupider than ever.

MIMI

And black and venomous. Poisonous really, more poisonous now than ever before.

FRANCOIS

Ever before when?

EDMUND

Before you used to give me that filth at the dinner table—on purpose, on purpose—so that it made me shiver?

MIMI

Before that?

FRANCOIS

Before you would seek some intimacy with me, force yourself on me,

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND

demanding I make love to you....

MIMI

Excuse me, would this be after you had turned your back on me?

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND

[not necessarily exactly together, but both of them saying the line on top of one another]

Excuse me, if I remember correctly you always turned your back on me, always.

FRANCOIS

I was supposed to pursue you,
put my arms around you so I was always in the position of the suitor,

EDMUND AND MIMI

you were always cool, no, cold,

FRANCOIS

I was supposed to be the beggar the suppliant
and then,

EDMUND AND MIMI

[not necessarily exactly together, but both of them saying the line on top of one another]

if I *had* to turn over because my arm had gone to sleep
and my shoulder feels broken
and I have a pain in my head,

EDMUND AND MIMI AND FRANCOIS

and I turned over because I couldn't bear the pain of holding you in my arms,
then did you

FRANCOIS

ever,

JAMES

ever,

MIMI

ever once,

FRANCOIS

did you ever a single fucking time turn over and hold me the way I held you?

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND AND MIMI AND JAMES—EVERYONE

[not necessarily exactly together, but all of them saying the line on top of one another]

No.

EDMUND

Did you ever pursue me the way I pursued you?

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND AND MIMI AND JAMES—EVERYONE

[not necessarily exactly together, but all of them saying the line on top of one another]

No.

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND AND MIMI AND JAMES—EVERYONE

[not necessarily exactly together, but all of them saying the line on top of one another]

You just got finished saying I come over to dinner and try to stay the night.

Is this not pursuing you?

Oh, sure! Now! Now! Now it's too late!

Why is it too late?

EDMUND

Because I woke up this afternoon in the middle of the afternoon with women's voices in the apartment below and I thought I had come to live finally in a home invaded by sluts! And I began to cry! I'm a man, and I began to cry! I can't take this bullshit forever! What kind of person do you think I am? Do you know why the earth has governments and dictators and none of the other planets do? Because this is the only planet where all the inhabitants do not say what they think, where people lie all the time, lie and lie and lie all the time, and I am sick of it. No, you cannot stay for dinner. No! Just fucking leave me alone!

Love! Love!

Do you think love is possible these days?

EVERYONE [variously]

No. No. Love is not possible these days. No. No. No.

[Music.

A big hostile dance

with everyone throwing everyone else to the ground over and over again,
venting their aggression

by running into the walls and trees,

throwing themselves to the ground all together in repeated synchronous
movements,

until, finally, still seething with rage or disgust,

or given over to hopelessness and despair,

they are exhausted,

sprawled on the ground or on the couch or in a chair,

and the music ends.]

Act Two

FRANK [gently]

Here's your milk.

EDMUND

Thank you, Frank.

FRANK

I'm sorry.

EDMUND

Thank you.

I apologize.

FRANK

One looks for things
and finds something else.

There's no simple story of boy meets girl
any more
these days.

And other stories, too,
are gone entirely.

And those people
who once loved in some other way
they're gone forever, too,
their lives, their loves
their sensibilities
we will never see anything that remotely resembles them again.
How people used to love
the ways for which we now have complete contempt.

We think because the past is no longer who we are
that the age that came before us is stupid
and that how we are today
or what it is we wish to be
is the true way and the good way—
even if, in fact, we are tormented every hour of our lives—
and, in any case, our true way is passing too
to yield to yet another true way
and who's to say the past
did not have pleasures as deep as those the future holds
or deeper
or perhaps simply different?

The aging gay man who had to keep his life a secret
and found ruses and manners to hide himself
and find another who would share his inner world
we don't know how it is to live like this today
that sense of nuance and subtlety
the decor of a home
that would suggest but not declare
the inner life of its host
that finely developed ability
to discriminate the gentlest hint

all this is gone
and it would be wrong to mourn its loss
and the suffering that so often went with it
and yet I still have friends who are lost
because it is lost
their lives
the lives they thought they would live all their lives
vanished suddenly
with nowhere to go
just as all of us
will one day be gone

our lives unrecoverable
the civilizations of the past
so distant from us
as to be more alien than foreign countries
human beings we recognize
are in some way related to us
and yet so different we cannot know
their inner lives
the only lives that matter
their private lives
the lives they thought they lived
are lost forever

and even as we live today from day to day
each day is lost as we live it
never to return
we shed our lives as we live them
we die each day
our lives becoming first stories
and then barely remembered dreams
the fleeting stuff of mortality
so that even as we live
we disappear
and all that we have treasured most
disappears along with us.

[James sits down next to Tessa,
trying to entice her into conversation.]

JAMES

You know,
maybe everybody does have a past.

[silence]

And, you know,
it's like they say,
when you go to bed with someone,
you bring six people to bed with you,
each other,
and the other person's parents
and your own parents.

[silence]

Well, or maybe even more people than that
because....

[silence]

TESSA

Are you trying to start a conversation with me?

JAMES

Yes.

TESSA

You should probably say something else.

JAMES

Right.

I was only just saying
it's like, you know,

you were saying you have this family
and this past you can't escape
and I was only saying....

TESSA

Right.
And I was saying,
maybe you want to talk about something else.

JAMES

But what I was saying was that other people
are not just your past
they are also your future.

TESSA

You mean, you're planning on having an affair with someone I know?

JAMES

No, no, no.
I mean, what we are is humanity,
I mean, part of humanity,
we just have to accept that,
we can't separate ourselves from that
from one another
so all of us all the time...
you know...

TESSA

What?

JAMES

Are part of humanity.

[silence]

You can't escape that.

[silence]

I'm a person too, you know.
You feel you grew up with certain
difficulties in your upbringing
but so did I!
So did everyone I suppose
and this is our chance
to love one another
because of our backgrounds
to console one another
to feel close *because* of the pain we've felt
to feel intimate
and to know even better how to take care of each other
because we know how important that is
and how it feels
and just where another person needs support.
Being fucked up, you know,
might be a *basis* for love.

TESSA

You're an American.

JAMES

Yes?

TESSA

I don't think I could like an American
or love an American
or really even have fun with an American.

JAMES

Aren't you an American?

TESSA

I'm half Italian.

JAMES

So you can't love someone who is all American?

TESSA

I don't think so.

JAMES

That's crazy.

TESSA

Why?

JAMES

Because Americans are just — Americans.

TESSA

So?

JAMES

Well, they're just Americans.

TESSA

So?

JAMES

So, what is that?

TESSA

Well, I don't know.

JAMES

So, you see?

TESSA

No, I don't see anything.

JAMES

You see, you could come to love me.

I'm crazy about you, Tessa,

you know, if somebody's crazy about you,

you can't resist it finally

because it feels so good to have someone be just crazy for you

and just love everything about you and everything you do
and just be delighted in you
and laugh at your jokes and feel for you
and love to do things with you
and look out for you
and all that sort of thing
I think I'm going to become irresistible to you.

TESSA [smiling]
You do?

JAMES
I'm really pretty sure of it.

Think, how,
you know,
I found my way to you,
which, in a way,
you have to believe is the most important thing in life
so you have to believe I know how to do the most important things
to have enough a sense of adventure to throw myself into the world
to see what happens
and to come up successful,
this couldn't be such a bad partner for someone.

TESSA
But what if you're not, I don't know, funny
or fun or something.

JAMES
I might not tell jokes
but I might just be ridiculous
which, in time, once you got to know me
could be constantly amusing to you.
Plus I think you're in a situation where anything could happen.

TESSA
I guess that's true.

JAMES

What else do you want of life?

TESSA

What do you mean?

JAMES

To live a life where anything could happen.

And then, of all the anythings,
you can choose what you like.

TESSA

I guess.

JAMES

Well, then.

TESSA

There's just a whole lot to fight your way through these days
how men are,
for that matter: how women have become
all the stuff
you know what I mean
you watch television
I'm doing a twelve-step program
I'm trying to work it through
but simple love
even if you're an OK guy
I don't think you can get there from here any more.

I was just wondering a little while ago
how it would be if we were sleeping together
and I imagined we had to sleep on a giant mattress on the floor
and you were chilly
and the cat was giving birth to eight kittens in the room
and it made you cranky.

So I went out to buy you some
red thermal underwear
and I came back with the wrong thing but by then
you weren't cold anymore but you needed a travel toiletry bag.
So I went back to the store for groceries
and the store was an Arabian camel tent
with pyramids of canned foods and regular check out grocery scanners
and I bought ten dozen yellow and red roses and a bunch of six foot high gladiolas
and a silver mesh Gucci toiletry bag for ten thousand dollars

And when I got home
you were asleep
wearing the red thermal underwear that was too small for you
and a pair of red gloves
with each finger labelled with random words on colored tapes

and you were wearing my black RayBan sunglasses
that you had already stretched out and ruined with your giant head.

I crawled on top of you and started kissing you
and you opened your eyes and yelled,
"How the fuck am I supposed to pay for a ten thousand dollar toiletry bag?!"
And you climbed up on the scaffolding at the foot of the bed
and started throwing the yellow and red roses at me—thorns first
and there were thorns stuck all over my arms and legs and chest
and the roses were hanging off me
and I was rolling around the mattress trying to get them off
and you told me you knew a guy named Todd
who had thrown batteries at his girlfriend and killed her
when she had done something like that
and then you smashed a tape recorder under your boot
and took out the batteries and threw them at my head
and you climbed higher and higher up the scaffolding
saying that the higher you went the more the batteries would hurt
and that even a penny could break my skull
from way up there.

[silence]

That's what I see when I fantasize about our being together.

[She looks at him for a moment
and then turns away from him.

In rage and despair, he grabs a chair,
takes it to an upstage corner, and sits facing into the woods.

Maria appears]

FRANCOIS

Maria!

How time flies!

MARIA

No wonder your family won't speak to you
and every woman you've ever been with has gone crazy
or killed herself.

Did you ever think about that?

It's not them, it's you!

You're like a baby with a switch blade.

So fucking needy

and when you get everything just the way you want it
you attack whoever gives in to you
for being weak and pathetic and worthless.

FRANCOIS

Okay. Okay.

This is how it is.

We're through.

Forget everything I ever said to make up.

The truth is: Frank is a better person than I am anyway.

I've never been a good person

or even an acceptable person

I'm actually a person of almost despicable character.

You should go back to Frank

what more could you want?

He's a wonderful person
loving and kind and considerate and generous.
What could you have been thinking
not just to be grateful for that?

MARIA

Probably you're just saying that,
but I think it's true.

FRANCOIS

It is true.
In fact, all you've ever done is string me along
out of some sense of discontent
you never could define!
You never loved me if you think about it.
Your heart has always been with Frank.

MARIA [to Frank]

What he says is true, Frank.
I do love you.
I'm sorry for all I've done to hurt you.
I don't know why I ran away from you.
I think I never felt you wanted me
but I want you, Frank,
let's never leave one another's side again.

FRANK

It's too late, Maria.

MARIA

Too late?

FRANK

I'm sorry.
I would never do anything to hurt you
because I do love you.
But now, you see, without you,
I've turned more and more to Edmund
for solace and companionship and,

finally,
love.
And now I couldn't betray him
after all he's done for me
his being there for me
his loyalty
he's completely won me over
and I think I never could find my way back to you.

EDMUND

Don't say that, Frank.
The truth is, you've never left her.
You've never been with me.
I've always felt you left half yourself behind.
And you could never let go completely
and be with me
the way I need someone to be
for my sake.
Go back to her.
She's your family.
You'll never be happy without her.

FRANK

Love these days:
it is such a strange and difficult terrain
so often we don't know where we are
or whether we're in the right place at all
we can't find a place that feels like home
our hearts are lost.
And I have to admit,
the place that feels like home to me
is with you, Maria.

MARIA

Oh, Frank,
I'm so happy
to feel we can start out again in life together
and have a whole second life.
One doesn't just throw away a marriage on a whim

for some fleeting romance or sudden passion
all those years
the chance of having an entire lifetime together
that's the truest treasure of all.

Shall we all have a drink—
or shall we have some tea?
Is this tea, Tessa?

TESSA
I don't think it's hot.

[Maria spills it down the front of Francois's trousers.]

FRANCOIS
Oh! Oh!
Yes, it is hot.

MARIA
Oh, Francois, I'm so sorry.

FRANCOIS
No, you're not!

MARIA
Here, give me your trousers,
you don't want to have a stain.

[she unbuckles his belt, starts to take off his trousers;
Tessa slowly stands up,
horrified by this further display of her family's behavior]

TESSA
Mother!

FRANCOIS
Excuse me. Please.
I don't think I'll be taking off my trousers.

TESSA
Mother!

MARIA
I'm only thinking what's practical!

FRANK
Let's all take off our trousers, then,
so you don't feel embarrassed.

FRANCOIS
Frank, you are the perfect host, but...

TESSA
Are you going to do this?

[he takes off his trousers
as Maria helps to remove Francois's;

meanwhile,
Gunter and Natalie enter;
they stand, their clothes dishevelled,
obviously having been in bed together,
looking at what's going on]

FRANCOIS
I don't think this is necessary,
a little tea can't hurt.

MIMI [to Natalie]
Natalie, where have you been?
And who is this?

NATALIE
This is Gunter.

MARIA
Hello, Gunter.

FRANK

Hello, Gunter.

GUNTER

How do you do?

MIMI

Is this your idea of getting even with me?

NATALIE

I don't know what you mean.

MIMI

Oh, yes, you do.

GUNTER

I'm not taking off my trousers.

MIMI

Oh,

taking off your trousers.

Right. Good idea.

I have an idea.

All the men take off their trousers

and I will make a sculpture of all of you.

I've always thought:

what would it be

to do a whole set of modern torsos?

GUNTER

Is this what people do here?

Everyone takes off his trousers?

JAMES

I'm not taking off my trousers I can tell you that.

EDMUND

I'm taking off my trousers.

NATALIE

Here.

I'll help you with your trousers, Gunter.

[Natalie goes for Gunter's pants.]

GUNTER

No, no.

I don't remove my trousers.

NATALIE

Come, Gunter.

What's the difference?

You could be wearing a swimming suit.

Lift your foot, Gunter.

GUNTER [seeing all the other men taking off their trousers]

Well, I don't know if this is right.

MARIA

Come along, James.

Is it James?

JAMES

Yes.

MARIA

Don't be shy.

We're among friends here.

Let me help you get your pants off.

JAMES

I don't think so.

I'm not a stripper.

MARIA

Of course you're not.

Taking off your trousers doesn't make you a stripper
or all men would be strippers.

TESSA

How can I have a relationship with a man
when my mother takes off everyone's pants
who comes into the house.

[Maria starts to take off his trousers]

MIMI

Now, if you will all lie down,
come,
lie down here in a row
on your backs, not your fronts,
not too close together....

[Tessa has ended up sitting in a corner,
like a Schiele doll,
her knees pulled up under her chin,
her dress pulled up to her waist,
and she is naked under her dress
and looking forlorn,
like a broken doll,
her head tilted over to one side.]

NATALIE

Come, Francois.

FRANCOIS [as he cooperates, led by Natalie]

You never think
I may have feelings, too.
Just because it seems to you I am indifferent
or cold
or interested only in conquests,
but I am a vulnerable person too in my way
I want just as much as you
to have a deep and meaningful relationship
but it may be that in my own way
I don't know any better than you in your way
just how to go about achieving it.

MIMI

that's good
I'll show you what I'm going to do
I'm going to make
plaster casts of your torsos
five male torsos I will call them.

Here, Francois,
I'll take you first.

[she starts to mix water and plaster of Paris
in a bucket;

Natalie gets Francois settled,
his head in her lap;

in fact,
though all the men have their pants off,
Mimi will never get beyond the cast of Francois;

suddenly, now, there is a tableau:
the men all lying down, propped up on their elbows,
the women arrayed around them
as though at a picnic;
we are at a salon
where there will be a philosophical conversation]

MARIA

I love art
and artists
people who make things in general
creative people
there are people who make things
and the other sort
and my feeling is
I love a person who makes something.

[Sentimental Italian music comes up
under the dialogue,
a violin or mandolin]

Because art
art is where we discover
in the freedom of our imaginations
what it is to be a human being

FRANCOIS

Or else, we discover it in love.
Because human beings are social animals
not isolated imaginations
and so we discover truly who we are
in our relationships
that's where we can see the full complexity
and wonder of a person
where we see the mystery of what it is to be a human being.

FRANK

Of course, you're talking here
not just about sensual love
what the Greeks called *erotike*
but also about love as friendship,
what they called *philia*.

Because the Greeks thought
love is not just a sentiment
but is actually the physical principle of the universe itself
the very stuff that binds the universe together.
And without it the whole world just falls apart.

GUNTER

This is fine for you to say
but it's not so clear you can know what it is to love
and so what it is to be a human being
unless you live the life of a bourgeois person in a bourgeois country
because
under Stalin

the Russians only made love an average of 1.2 times a month
the same is true in Bulgaria as I happen to know
and then not very happily
and mostly in the doggie position
this is a statistic
this is a fact.
And some people, in prisons,
they forget entirely how to reach out to another human being
to touch another person in any way
that isn't cruel.

How do you think it is for the street hookers
who live in the alleys of Istanbul and Havana?

TESSA

You look around the world,
and you think:
should there be love in a world like this?
Of should there only be politics?

JAMES

This is true.
I think this is true.

FRANK

Still, we carry on.

TESSA

We shouldn't.

MARIA

No matter what,
you can't stop living.

GUNTER

And yet, it can seem strange
to live in a world where, just to get a lipstick,
you have to choose between

Red
or Hot Red
or Classic Red
or Real Red
or Radiant Red
or Russian Red
Reggae Red
Love that Red
Uptown Red
Drop Dead Red
Red Red Red
Crimson Splendour
Guerlain no 102 Rouge Boléro KissKiss Hydro-soft
Guerlain no 103 Rouge Satin Tango KissKiss Hydro-soft
Guerlain no 104 Rouge Passsion KissKiss Hydro-soft
Cherry
Crushed Cherry
Cherry Blossom
Very Very Cherry
Cherries Jubilee
Hard Candy Tramp....

[silence;
bewilderment and awe at Gunter's knowledge of lipstick]

FRANCOIS

The world can be so confusing,
what are the rules, what is allowed, what is not allowed
and we live in constant anguish.

You have to reinvent your relationship every day
discover all over every day what it might be
what a woman wants
what you yourself might want.

MARIA

And then, sometimes
you might live apart from your wife or lover
and so you have love affairs

or you even agree to have love affairs
even while, at the same time, in your own way,
you remain faithful to one another in your love for one another
whatever you might be doing physically
and yet, no matter how you sort it out,
even at the moment you are going to bed with another person
it makes you feel even more alone and betrayed

FRANCOIS

And then
when you say, for example, do you love me?
then she replies I don't know you
because in fact she never will, she never will.

JAMES

Why not?

FRANCOIS

Because I rediscover who I am every day,
it's a moving target, you can't hit it.
How can you have love at all these days?
These days,
it's not easy for a man and a woman to fall in love.

MARIA

It never was.

GUNTER

One needs courage.

EDMUND

Human beings.

MARIA

It turns out life is nothing but loose ends.
It's not that, just because one has many love affairs
or love affairs with people one shouldn't
that that makes you a person incapable of love
or a person who has no feelings

I myself
I pray for a better world
a world where there will be no such thing
as unrequited love and pain and suffering
and women can return the love of any man
where people live in peace
where the whole world will be like Tuscany
the evening sunset on the vines
and olive trees
a golden glow
roses growing up the sides of farm houses
a glass of wine in the lingering twilight
grandchildren playing down by the arbor
reading by the pool
the circus performers from the village
coming out to the house for lunch
entertaining the children with their clowning
and juggling
the family in the kitchen
making dinner together
the children picking fresh vegetables
the neighboring farmer holding forth
reciting Dante by heart
stanza after stanza
and bursting into song
arias from Verdi
the mother sitting at the hearth
giving her breast to her baby
fresh herbs
the fennel and the basil
the roasted garlic and the fish stew
we'll have our own wine
from the vines nearby the house
our own olive oil
from the trees on the nearby hillside
we will laugh and cry and tell stories
we will have love affairs
and no one will be hurt
aunts and uncles will gather every Sunday

to take care of the children
while we have a nap in the upstairs bedroom
oh Tuscany Tuscany
how I long for you and love you.

FRANCOIS

In the olden days
you were married for life, that was it
and then you have your love affairs.
But nowadays these love affairs cause nothing but pain or death,
and it seems you shouldn't have them.

EDMUND

Or you might say,
this wonderful married love
this is not for me.
What I long for is a moment
and nothing more
an intense moment
a moment even of pain
or especially of pain
never mind the falling in love
the consummation
the lifelong pleasure
let us cut right to the end of it
the searing pain
that lets us know
we did once long and love
we are alive
and this awful pain proves it
over and over again.

FRANK

This is not my idea of love.

GUNTER

Or it may be
rather than feeling the pain ourselves
we like to inflict it on others

to enable them to feel what we ourselves cannot
and this can be a form of generosity
giving the sensation of life to another
life at its most intense and intimate

MARIA

Oh, Gunter, really....

[Natalie now launches into an aria
whose sole purpose is to get Mimi's attention
and seduce her.]

NATALIE

Sometimes you might like to say to someone
hey! go ahead
do your worst
stick it in me,
up my ass,
piss on me,
double up your belt,
make it sting
make me lie still
make me whimper
make me beg

Because I like to feel some leather
up between my legs from time to time
with a little silk
a knee up in my crotch
nails down my sides
bone against my clit
a little bit of rubbing
The old double dildo
and you've got to like an animal from time to time.

Or you might say to your partner
make it hurt
spank me, pinch me
give me an enema

bite me, burn me,
but watch out for the joints, the nerves,
watch out for the blood vessels, you know
I'm taking this for granted,
this will be safe
think about the front of the thigh,
the shoulder, the upper arm,
use a little soap and water,
alcohol, Betadine,

keep it perpendicular to the skin
make a gentle cut
wait a minute before the blood begins to flow
and then another cut or prick
like lightning going through the body

and when it's done
rub it with wine
stain it
leave a mark there
because these marks are here for life
these are commitments being made
we're never going back

MIMI
never.

NATALIE
And what do you need in life finally but
some bandaids
smelling salts
sterile cotton

MIMI
bandage scissors

NATALIE
bolt cutters

MIMI
aspirin

NATALIE
spare keys

MIMI
a marlinspike

NATALIE
ice pack

MIMI
hydrogen peroxide

NATALIE
rectal thermometer

MIMI
KY jelly

NATALIE
tweezers.

MIMI
And then you can feel free to say to your mate
you could tie me down
so I can't jump when you cut me
you know
Do it slow
then work me over
this is what I like
and tell me bedtime stories

NATALIE
You could powder me.
You could oil me.
You could dress me up.
You could take me out.

[Mimi, having gotten caught up in Natalie's fantasy,
has been worked up into a sweat.
She takes a deep breath now.]

MIMI

There.

I'm done.

I call these plaster casts of torsos
my erection series
because
no matter what a man does
when he feels the heavy warmth of plaster on his torso
he can't keep himself from getting an erection
don't ask me why.

[Silence.

Mimi and Natalie are fixated on one another.

All the others look at Francois.

Maria bursts into song,
an aria from an Italian opera,
leading to a chorus

so that everyone joins her in singing the opera,
even Tessa;

while they sing,
Mimi takes Natalie by the hand
and guides her into the woods
or to the steamer trunk,
opens the trunk, and gets into it with Natalie and closes the lid;

and also, while they sing,

beautiful things ascend from beneath the ground to heaven

or rose petals rain down

or ten thousand brightly colored beach umbrellas descend from the skies;

at the end, there is silence,
and the sound of the surf]

GUNTER

Dear God,
did you hear these women singing together?

MARIA

Thank you, Gunter.

GUNTER

But, no,
could you hear yourself?
I am speaking of you and your daughter.

TESSA

I was only singing.
I wasn't listening.

GUNTER

The two of you
mother and daughter
your voices flowing in and out of one another
like quicksilver
like a mountain brook
like satin sheets

MARIA

Oh, Gunter, really.

GUNTER

Like the spring breeze in the branches
like the silk camisole
beneath the summer dress

MARIA

Gunter, please.

GUNTER

Like the summer light
falling on the pillow
in the late afternoon
and the ocean waves are quiet
as the tide goes out once more

FRANK

Gunter.

GUNTER

My mother sang to me every night
when she put me to bed
and sometimes my grandmother would join her
the two of them singing to me
their duets and solos
from the operas we had attended all together
and I have often thought
one never knows
what one seeks in life
why this man loves a woman with fair hair
or this woman needs a man who seems substantial
while that woman needs a man who is tender
or even weak
a man may love a woman
or a man may love a man
but why will he love this woman or that man
these things that make us long for another human being
or need another
that make us unable to sleep
or make us tremble
make us perspire with a passion we don't understand
it is so specific and so sickening and so potent
it frightens us
we run from it
we choose instead some more peaceful seeming love
some love we can bear from day to day
even though eventually it may come to bore us
and we forget what it is that makes our knees buckle

until, by accident,
we come across it again in the most unexpected place
as I have just done this moment
with you, Maria, and with you, Tessa
hearing the two of you sing
I recognize: I love you
I love the two of you together, singing
and I need you
I want you
I need to marry you
please, Maria, please
[he is on his knees and weeping now]
I beg you
I can't help myself
I can only plead that I can't help myself
or else I would
I only thank god in this moment
that the passion I can't resist is this one
instead of, as it could have been—
who knows? we seem to have no control of these things—
a passion to whip someone or shoot them
I beg you, Maria
I beg you, Tessa

MARIA
Gunter.

GUNTER
come with me
sing to me
I'll take care of you as you've never been cared for before.

FRANK
Gunter.

GUNTER
What do you say, Tessa?
I pray to God
I'll give you anything you want.

EDMUND

This is too bizarre.

GUNTER

The Mormons love two women all the time
or three or four

EDMUND

Because of the way they sing?

GUNTER

Perhaps!

I don't know.

And why not?

JAMES

This is insane!

GUNTER

I don't say it's not insane.

I apologize for it.

But I can't control the way I feel.

MARIA

You should!

GUNTER

I can't.

I won't.

I love you, Maria.

MARIA

You are a creep, Gunter!

No one likes this sort of weird
kinky kind of thing.

I am a normal person, Gunter,
with normal sorts of normal feelings.

GUNTER

What I feel feels normal to me.

FRANK

I've never heard of such a thing.

GUNTER

This happens all the time
someone becomes transported by another person
this is what is called love.

MARIA

This is sick.

JAMES

Sick.

MARIA

Sick.

FRANCOIS

Do you think you can just come in and take another man's love
right from under his nose
and this is an acceptable thing to do.

GUNTER

I tell you, I can't be blamed.

FRANCOIS

Who would you ever blame then
if not you yourself?
Would you blame a man
who likes to be tickled with pheasant feathers?

GUNTER

No. No, I wouldn't.

FRANCOIS

That was a bad example.

Would you blame....

GUNTER

You can't blame anyone for love.

You can weep for them

but you can't blame them.

I could be so happy with the two of you

so filled with joy

it would overflow and fill your whole world

so that finally

you would be happy, too,

I know it

just as my mother and my grandmother were

taking care of me when I was a little boy

chastising me when I had done wrong

spanking me if I needed it

and sometimes I must admit

I did need it.

And we could be just this happy together

if you would just give me a chance.

I beg you, Maria.

I beg you.

[he has Maria's foot, which he is trying to kiss;

and she is trying to get away from him;

Francois comes and gently pries Gunter loose,

and takes him to one side,

putting an arm around his shoulder]

FRANCOIS

Here, here, Gunter, come with me.

GUNTER [weeping]

I love her.

I'm afraid I can't get over it.

FRANCOIS

Many people have had to get over it, Gunter.
She is a wonderful woman,
with a big heart,
but she can't love everyone.

[Francois helps Gunter to a place to sit down,
where Gunter sits in absolute desolation
and then gradually rolls under the desk in a fetal position.]

MARIA

I wish I could love you, Gunter,
I would if I could,
but it is the nature of women
they are able to love only one man

or two

or so
but there comes a limit
or not
but with me this is how it is.

[Bertha, an elderly woman, enters.]

BERTHA

I'm terribly sorry
we've been having a party next door
and suddenly I looked around and my little boy was gone.
I suppose he just ran out.
Have you seen my son?

MARIA

Oh. No.
I'm sorry.
Let's look for him.

EDMUND

Could he have come in through the kitchen?

FRANK

Or he might have come in through the terrace.

MARIA

Oh, how unsettling.

I remember I lost Tessa when she was a tiny little thing
and we didn't find her for hours
do you remember Frank
and she was down by the ocean playing in the surf
and just as I spotted her
she tipped upside down in the water like a little cork
and of course she couldn't swim
and so she couldn't get herself right side up
I got to her just in time
and I thought
thank God
if we'd found her a moment later
it would have been too late.

[an awkward silence at this story she shouldn't have told Bertha
at this moment]

FRANK

I'm sure he's fine.
Children these days are tough little creatures.

MARIA

We should branch out
so we cover all directions.

JAMES

How old is your little boy?

BERTHA

He will be forty-three on his next birthday.

[Silence.

Everyone—on the verge of scattering in different directions—stops.
They all look at the same time toward Gunter, under the desk.]

Gunter!
Whatever are you doing there?
I was worried sick!
Where have you been?

GUNTER
I don't know.
I was taken outdoors by—someone—
I don't see her here.

[Hilda, an even more elderly woman enters.
She shouts everything she says.]

HILDA
Have you found him, Bertha?

BERTHA
It seems he has been here all the time.

HILDA
What have you been doing, Gunter?

GUNTER
I'm sorry.

MARIA
And this must be your grandmother?

HILDA
I beg your pardon?

MARIA
Would you be Gunter's grandmother
he was talking so much about.

HILDA

Not at all.

I am his mother's lover.

We have been together fifty-seven years this September
and never had an unhappy day.

MARIA

Oh,

well,

I'm so glad to hear it.

FRANK

Relationships can be so complicated these days.

HILDA

Relationships have always been complicated.

Why is it people these days think they have invented complications?

Bertha and I had a hell of a time getting together

it was never easy

all the people who thought they had a corner

on the one true way of living on earth

and they ought to bury anyone else who had hold of a different stick

BERTHA

Hilda....

HILDA

but we did it

because what the hell is the point of life

if it's not to live it?

FRANK

Yes, well, no doubt.

HILDA

What?

FRANK [shouting]

I say, no doubt.

HILDA

What the hell,
do you think I'm hard of hearing?
It's a timid age we live in.

BERTHA

Hilda....

HILDA

The landscape of love has always been a rocky one,
filled with swamps and pitfalls
brambles and sticky bushes
and slippery slopes and precipices
what the hell has ever been the point
except to slash your way through the underbrush to score?

BERTHA

Of course, without hurting anyone.

HILDA

Of course. I'm not a Visigoth.
Although sometimes, let's face it,
shit happens.
You give it your best effort.
I try to be very, very careful—
but you can't hold back just because there's no such thing as life insurance.

Sometimes we don't find anyone.

Sometimes we hurt someone.

Sometimes it doesn't last.

BERTHA

Hilda....

HILDA

Sometimes a love has the lifespan of a butterfly.
So does life itself.
We make the best of it.

Because time is running out.
Time is running out!
This is the only shot you've got!

BERTHA
Hilda....

HILDA
You've got to set a course and damn the torpedoes.
And what do they mean you can pursue happiness
but you can never find it.
Why do they tell you such a thing,
just to keep you from doing it?
Bertha and me: we've found happiness.
We are happy people.
I recommend it!

BERTHA
Hilda: sometimes she gets a little carried away

HILDA
On a rant....

BERTHA
But she's really a very nice person.

MARIA
Will you stay for tea?

HILDA
No, thank you, it's naptime for Bertha and me.
And for you, too, Gunter.

GUNTER
I was having a little nap.

HILDA
You're going to be much more comfortable in your own bed.
Come along, Gunter.

BERTHA

Thank you so much for looking after Gunter.

MARIA

Not at all.

BERTHA

Come, Gunter.

GUNTER

Goodbye.

[Bertha exits, followed by Gunter.]

HILDA

Nice chatting.

You'll have to come and visit us sometime
if you like to get naked in a hot tub.

Bertha likes things a little kinky
but I'm always telling her:

not with the guests, Bertha,
not with the guests!

People don't like things out of the ordinary.

Well, they're young.

Once you get to be my age,
you like to make sure you haven't missed anything.

Do come and visit us.

You're lovely people.

And don't forget,
for us it's open house every day.

[She leaves.]

Barbara enters, carrying the pizza box.]

BARBARA

Have you decided about lunch?

The pizza's getting cold.

MARIA

Oh, Barbara, we forgot all about it.
Come, people, what would we like?

TESSA

Whatever.

JAMES

Do you have any peanut butter?

FRANK

Salmon would be nice.

EDMUND

Just some raspberries for me.

[Bob enters.]

MARIA

Raspberries?

EDMUND

Some pale yellow raspberries.

BOB

This is the same place.

MARIA

Oh, it's the pizza man.

BOB

Did you phone for another pizza?

EVERYONE

I didn't phone.

Did you phone?

No.

No, I didn't phone.

EDMUND

We didn't phone.

MARIA

I'm terribly sorry if there has been some confusion....

BOB

You know, pizza is not returnable.

MARIA

I don't think anyone here is going to pay for a pizza we didn't order.

BOB

I am not taking this pizza back to the pizza parlor.

Who is going to pay for the pizza?

TESSA

What is this, some form of extortion?

EDMUND

I'll pay for the pizza.

Here.

BOB

Last time, if I'm not mistaken
you gave me a good tip as well.

EDMUND

Here's a tip.

BOB

What's happened?

You've lost your job since we last saw one another?

EDMUND

OK. Here.

TESSA

This is enough.

I, for one, I have to get back to work.

Maybe no one else has to work,
but I have to work.

And work is good.

This is another way to spend your life.

MARIA

Work?

What are you working on, Tessa?

TESSA

I am doing a translation for James.

MARIA

A translation.

JAMES

About love.

And women.

MARIA

Love, of course. Love.

Well, we know.

TESSA

What do you know?

FRANK

What is it you have?

It's not as though none of us has ever worked.

MARIA

Or loved.

FRANCOIS

Or loved.

All of us have worked.

It may be we can work with you.

FRANCOIS

Let me see.

TESSA

Please don't get mixed up in this
and make everything all topsy turvy.

MARIA

Well, I don't think anyone would make it topsy turvy.

FRANCOIS

What is this?

JAMES

It's for a book.

It has some photographs and some text.

FRANCOIS [looking at the pages on the desk]

Right. Right. Right.

I think we can help with this.

I think, you know,

what you have is good

but it doesn't go quite far enough.

JAMES

Far enough?

FRANCOIS

I think love is more intense, clearly, than what you have here....

JAMES

I don't think you ought to get....

FRANCOIS

You know, tragedies
and people fighting
slamming car doors,
driving off and leaving a woman by the side of the road at night.
At least,
this is what I hear.
Probably I could help you.
Let me have a pen.

MARIA

Here.

TESSA

Pardon my saying so
but I don't think any of you knows anything about love
and now you think you're going to write the book!?

FRANCOIS

We're not going to write anything
or even change what has been written.
But, well....
for instance, this, with this photograph:
"a slender, lovely, graceful girl,
just budding into supple line" —
who would say such a thing?
it would be pretentious
of course I'm not a writer,
still, nonetheless....

MARIA

Who could speak of love
if not you?

FRANCOIS

That's kind of you to say.
Not that I know so much
but perhaps I can help a little bit.

[handing the paper to Maria]

Now this is just a suggestion, but,
you might try, for example—
here....

[as she reads it and passes it to Frank
who passes it to Edmund who passes it to James while
Francois continues]

JAMES

Everyone seems to be an expert....

FRANCOIS

And then, too....

[he begins to edit another bit of paper]

you might say....just as an example....

TESSA

What is this?

FRANCOIS

What is what?

TESSA

"in copulating
one discovers
That."

What is "That?"

FRANCOIS

That's what Roberto wrote.

TESSA

Or Francesco.

FRANCOIS
Or Francesco.

TESSA
I know that.
But what is "That."

JAMES [sitting, head in hands]
God.

FRANCOIS
That's what I have translated from his Italian.

TESSA
I thought it was already in English and you were translating into Italian.

FRANCOIS
Oh.

TESSA
So now you are translating from English into English. Okay.
But the "That" that you have in that.
[pointing to the piece of paper]
What is "That"?

FRANCOIS
That's what he says.
It's his idea, it's his sentiment.
What do you mean, what is that?
I'm not going to change it.

TESSA
Look here at the phrase:
"In copulating
one discovers
That."
What is the "That" that one discovers.

FRANCOIS

Oh, "That."

Well,

I don't know.

TESSA

You don't know?

You are translating this

whatever you are doing to it

and you don't know what it means?

FRANCOIS

It's a mystery.

It's an unknown.

It is the great, wonderful unknowable deep knowledge

one discovers that is different for everyone.

Possibly.

I don't know.

I'm just trying to bring a little depth and sophistication and complexity to the text

because, let's face it, our young friend James here is, after all,

an American

and it may be that he doesn't know a great deal about love.

TESSA

Who doesn't know anything about love?

FRANCOIS

I don't say he doesn't know anything about it,

possibly just not so much

in its details and subtleties.

TESSA

Are you crazy?

You know nothing about love, nothing!

I've never known a man

who had so much tenderness as James

so much caring

a man so solicitous

who had so much regard for another person
and so much respect
and loyalty
and steadfastness
and dependability and sweetness.
Someone you could count on
when you're feeling vulnerable
to take care of you
even when you yourself are maybe not so friendly
in a bad mood
to have the strength and goodness
not to be put off by that
but to stay right with you
until you could accept his caring
and his kindness
and his carefulness
and his thoughtfulness
and his gentleness
and his honor

[silence;
everyone is stunned by her outpouring of affection for James;
no one is more stunned than James;
then she realizes what she has done
and turns away]

MARIA

That's lovely, Tessa,
and yet, to be fair,
it's not as though Francois knows nothing about love.
In fact, he knows a great deal about love, about passion
and excitement
about what it is to thrill to life
and to be thrilling to a woman
to make a woman laugh
to make her quiver and cry with happiness
to make her weep with sorrow that her life will ever end
to hold a moment in her heart as though it were forever
and you would never let it go

and you long for it and pine for it to return
you carry it with you in your heart your entire life
you cherish it
you never forget it
because it was the moment that made your entire life worth living.

[silence;
everyone is stunned by this confession of love for Francois]

FRANK
Indeed,
I think I know something about love myself,
about patience and forbearance and generosity
about wishing for happiness for another person,
Maria:
whatever might bring that to her
wishing that for her
even if it means
not having such happiness oneself
but taking real joy in the happy life of another.

[silence;

Francois takes Maria's hand]

FRANCOIS
Maria.

MARIA
Francois.

[A love song of the 50s or a heartbreaking aria by Caruso
on a record with scratches and crackles.

Francois and Maria leave together.

Frank starts to follow them out, stops, looks after them.]

JAMES

Will you go away with me?

TESSA

Live with you, do you mean?

JAMES

Yes.

TESSA

How could anyone do that
when you see how hard and painful it is?

JAMES

Not for everyone it seems to me.

TESSA

For everyone. Yes. For everyone.

[Edmund is watching Frank from the other side.]

JAMES

And yet, at the same time,
maybe love is something that will grow,
these things
you never can tell
not every love begins like in the movies
where a person is swept off her feet
sometimes it grows and deepens over the years
you grow together
until in old age
you are so close
so intimate
you are like the home you live in
indivisible
and so deeply happy in the place you live
you can't even understand it.

Maybe this is not your only choice
but this could still be one of your options, Tessa.

How about just going out to dinner with me?
There's no food in the house, right?

[silence]

There's food in the house, but you don't feel like cooking.
Am I right?

TESSA
Right.

JAMES
You throw on a little something,
we go to Tre Scalini,
what's to lose?

TESSA
Well....

[Frank continues to look in the direction in which Maria left.]

JAMES
How many times have you eaten at Tre Scalini?

TESSA
My parents took me there when I was a kid.

JAMES
Now you go back as a grownup.
Tessa, time is passing,
you've been to Tre Scalini only once in your life
already you're a grownup
you could get to be sixty years old
still sitting home
waiting for the right person to call,
hoping to go to Tre Scalini one more time before you die.

Let me take you out.
Let's go somewhere.
Maybe go on from dinner to a party
maybe stay up all night
go for a walk on the beach in the early morning
maybe not
this is how it is to be alive
it's no big deal.

[Edmund turns and leaves.]

TESSA
I don't know.
Nowadays it seems to me
you have to be so brave
even to accept a dinner invitation—
and to fall in love
that seems like a calamity,
even life or death,
and at the least a swamp.

[Frank turns around—sees Edmund has gone]

And, anyway,
I'm not dressed.

JAMES
I have something for you.

[he hands her a red satin slip]

TESSA
This is a slip.

JAMES
Everyone's wearing slips these days.

TESSA
As a dress?

JAMES

Yes.

TESSA

To go out?

JAMES

Sure.

TESSA

Not in Martha's Vineyard, I don't think.

JAMES

Of course in Martha's Vineyard.

It all started here.

[she steps into the slip;

[Frank, looking lost,
sits on the couch.]

TESSA

I like it.

JAMES

I thought it would be good on you.

JAMES

Do you believe in love at first sight?

[a long pause]

TESSA

Yes.

[James and Tessa kiss—a long, long kiss.]

JAMES

Do you dance?

TESSA

Of course I dance.

[They dance.

Frank puts his head slowly into his hands.

The lights fade to twilight and darkness.]

Charles Mee's work has been made possible by the support
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